



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT PARTNER PROFILES

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Guardian Community Living Embraces CDS As It Continues To Have Quality Its Top Priority

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— Julie James



In 2005 when the College of Direct Support (CDS) began to show up at Provider Meetings in Tennessee to introduce its online training to Tennessee's provider agencies, I was representing Guardian Community Living (GCL) as its Staff Development Coordinator, and I was there to keep us abreast of training requirements. Around me, on all sides, from people in these agencies, I heard murmurs and worried comments about taking on such a momentous task. Many comments reflected the idea that staff members were just not computer literate enough to complete the training. Many worried about cost. Some even worried that it might put them out of a job. If the training was computer based, what would classroom trainers do?

What I heard through the clamor was -- "The State of Tennessee has signed a 5 year contract with CDS." This one statement told me that our state had made a commitment to reach for better, more consistent training and a system that would deliver training in a way that new generations of staff could recognize. I had been dreaming for such change for years. I went to the representatives of CDS -- Bill Tapp and Donna Kosak -- and asked to be the first administrator signed up and trained.

Then I went back to Guardian's state director, Harold Sloves, and told him how wonderful it would be to lead the state in the pilot program. Harold embraces any opportunity to have the agency move ahead of the pack in quality. He asked for estimates of cost and what was needed to get the pilot off the ground. We began with only two computers devoted to training,

went to three more soon after, and now have a full computer lab with 10 computers devoted to enhanced training. Our other sites in Tennessee followed suit by developing computer labs accessible to Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), nurses and therapists. We integrated the training across the board to include clinical staff long before it was to be required.

In the beginning, Tennessee's Department of Mental Retardation Services (DMRS) was only asking that new staff be brought into the program. Convinced that tenured staff deserved the opportunity to get this training first, I challenged all of our Home Coordinators to do 22 lessons. They completed this in less than 30 days! Then they were asked to challenge their staff to complete the same 22 lessons. I began putting large golden stars on training room walls to recognize those who had completed the 22 lessons. As of May 2009, we have trained between 800 and 900 DSPs using CDS and we support approximately 175 adults with disabilities.

Soon, anyone without a star was asking for the training! Then a certificate was developed for recognition. When I announced that new staff would be required to complete 52 lessons, some of the tenured staff came and asked to be assigned the rest of the lessons. Having been involved with staff development for nearly 10 years, it is the first time I can say that I was ever asked for more training opportunities by staff. The meager incentives were almost certainly small tokens of recognition that my budget allowed, but they translated into a competition that brought pride to many of the staff.

In a period of time when all of us are facing the tough economy and raises are

often on hold as people simply try to hold onto their jobs, it is a good feeling to be able to offer our staff a chance to see a future in the field of disabilities, through better staff education. More than simply improving the training for our DSPs, I have seen the GCL/College of Direct Support partnership raise morale and give DSPs a reason to stay longer on the job, and to encourage friends to seek employment with our agency. Going into our sixth year of supported living, I see many familiar faces, determined to make the most of the growing opportunities.

Since that Pilot Program, CDS has continued to bring to all Tennessee providers more updated, new and specific training desirable in the DMRS field. Anyone needing inspiration need only attend the annual CDS Administrators' Forum held in conjunction with ANCOR's Management Practices conference. The first conference I attended in New Orleans in 2008 was eye opening in learning the different ways that other states were using CDS. In San Francisco in 2009, I came away energized and eager to move beyond the training (though extensive) offered by CDS and bring training into the web-based system generated by our own people. The new CDS OnTrack system has allowed GCL and others to track Medication Administration Certification, CPR, Person-Specific Training and other training which require renewal. The newest addition to training that we are taking advantage of is the Autism Module.

Eight years ago, I struggled with what I considered to be a sub-standard system of training in our state that tended to match the same problems faced by the Tennessee school system. Today, I have pride in the fact that our state took a very real risk to bring the standards up to such a level of those established within the CDS curriculum and its Learning Management System. I thank not only the Deputy Commissioner

of DMRS, Stephen Norris, but also the Director of Staff Development, Richard Shelton, and his tireless training committee. Most of all I have to thank Harold Sloves for making a brave decision in trying financial times and believing that we could make this work in our agency. Without his moral support and the necessary expenditure by Guardian, I could not have brought this level of success to our staff.

Over the five years GCL has provided residential services, we have remained in the Quality Tier, despite growing pains and progressive moves such as CDS. Quality remains the top priority for GCL. Guardian and Harold Sloves have allowed me to share our success with other agencies endeavoring to take on the CDS challenge, through an open door policy to visit and see our computer lab, telephone conference calls and my own participation in state staff development meetings and provider forums to encourage other providers to follow us.

GCL has begun plans to bring more computer-based programs into use with the opening of their first community ICF/MR homes. Joining with Therap Services Inc., the documentation system has already begun to be implemented and computerized documentation will begin with the first ICF/MR under GCL's management the second week of June 2009.

CDS began our journey into state-of-the-art training two years ago and prepared us for our next foray into computer-based documentation and record keeping. With the knowledge gained in the last two years, the excellent support system provided by CDS staff, and the will to make positive changes, the partnership between Guardian Community Living and CDS will take us into a bright future in serving individuals with developmental disabilities.

(Written by Julie James, Staff Development Coordinator and CDS Administrator, for Guardian Community Living in Memphis, TN. You may contact Julie via email at jj-ames@guardianhealthcare.com or by calling 901.682.1940.)

About CDS Partner Profiles

CDS Partner Profiles highlights the activities of state and local organizations that have integrated the College of Direct Support into efforts to elevate the preparation, performance, status, and compensation of direct support professionals (DSPs) and frontline supervisors and managers (FSMs). The purpose of the the CDS Partner Profiles is to identify and describe a variety of innovative and exemplary initiatives and activities into which the CDS has been integrated. CDS Partner Profiles are written by leaders of organizations that are actually engaged in these efforts.

College of Direct Support (CDS)
www.collegeofdirectsupport.com


The College of Direct Support (CDS) and its companion College of Frontline Supervision and Management (CFSM) are Internet-delivered multimedia, competency-based training curricula for DSPs and FSMs supporting individuals with disabilities.

The CDS is available for review at: collegeofdirectsupport.com

For more information about the CDS, contact Bill Tapp at bill@collegeofdirectsupport.com or Donna Kosak at donna@collegeofdirectsupport.com or call toll-free, 877-353-2767

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